



5 ways employers can make workplaces more menstruation-friendly

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To commemorate this Menstrual Hygiene Day, the Women's Bureau is breaking down the stereotypes and stigmas that have made menstruation a taboo topic in the workplace. Menstruation is a natural part of half our population's life, and yet it has been overlooked in the context of work - perhaps because it is seen as a personal issue or uncomfortable to discuss. The taboo nature of menstruation has likely contributed to the lack of understanding about its impact on workers, which can include challenges related to symptoms of premenstrual syndrome; unexpected or heavy bleeding; and pain from cramps, headaches or migraines while at work.



Implementing workplace policies that address menstruation can enable menstruating employees to continue to fully participate in and contribute to the workforce while mitigating adverse effects to their mental and physical health. Most employers are already ensuring easy access to bathrooms and providing proper handwashing facilities and regular breaks during work hours. And menstruating employees may be protected under laws and regulations against discrimination on the basis of age, sex and disability (or a combination of these characteristics), the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, sick leave requirements for federal contractors and state paid family and medical leave or sick leave laws. But there is more that employers can do to support menstruators.

Here are five more ways employers can make workplaces more menstruation-friendly:

1. Provide a sufficient supply of varied period products in bathrooms and ensure menstruators can access products privately.
2. Allow flexibility in uniforms, with options in dark colors to ensure menstruators do not need to worry that an unexpected period or heavier flow will lead to noticeable stains.
3. Allow scheduling and work flexibilities such as telework, flexible work hours or shift modifications.
4. Guarantee access to paid sick leave, provide explicit guidance that menstruation is a qualifying condition for the leave – whether for symptom management or for related medical appointments – and ensure that employees and their managers are aware these are allowable reasons to use sick leave.
5. Educate and train workers and managers about the symptoms of menstruation and how they can impact employees at work and include support services for menstruation in any Employee Assistance Program offered.

Many of the same policies and protocols needed to support those managing symptoms of menstruation are already being implemented by many employers. Employers can make small adjustments to worker protections, flexibilities and accommodations to ensure that workplaces are more inclusive of menstruating employees, reduce

the stigma surrounding menstruation and improve menstruators’ quality of life at work. Making workers aware that they may use a workplace flexibility for menstruation-related reasons can help create an environment in which workers and managers are more comfortable discussing these topics and requesting the help they need.

Menstruation does not have to be taboo. Employees who feel supported can continue to thrive in the workplace during their periods. By providing basic protections and accommodations, employers can signal a commitment to ensuring all workers maintain the dignity they deserve.

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